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ROBERT BARNWELL RHETT
ON THE BIOGRAPHY OF
CALHOUN, 1854

CONTRIBUTED BY
GAILLARD HUNT

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DOCUMENTS

1. *Joseph Gales on the War Manifesto of 1812*

JOSEPH GALES (1780-1860), of the firm of Gales and Seaton, author of the letter and memorandum which follow, was from 1810 to 1860 editor and proprietor of the *National Intelligencer*, and as such had unusual means of information concerning many events in the political history of the United States. Richard K. Crallé, to whom the letter was addressed, was a wealthy planter in Virginia, of literary tastes and a devoted friend and follower of John C. Calhoun. When Calhoun was Secretary of State in 1844, he became the chief clerk of the Department of State, a position corresponding with that of an assistant secretary at the present time. He was Calhoun's literary executor and collected and edited his works (New York, 1853-1854). He also gathered material for a life of Calhoun of which only some disconnected notes survive. I am indebted to his grandson, J. Lawrence Campbell, esq., of Bedford City, Virginia, for the two letters which are printed here.

For the report to which the first letter relates, see *Annals of Congress*, 12th Cong., part II., p. 1546, and compare the President's message to Congress, June 1, 1812, *Messages and State Papers of the Presidents*, I. 499. The report has always, heretofore, been attributed to Calhoun. John Randolph Tucker's article on Calhoun in Appleton's *Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, says: "He drew a report which placed before the country the issue of war, or submission to wrong." Von Holst's *Calhoun*, p. 21, and his *Constitutional History of the United States*, I. 232, leave the impression that Calhoun wrote the report. Gay's *Madison*, p. 298, says: "Mr. Calhoun's committee followed this lead [set by the President's message] and improved upon it in the report recommending an immediate declaration of war." Henry Adams, *History of the United States*, VI. 226, says: "Calhoun brought in a report recommending an immediate appeal to arms. As a history of the causes which led to this result, Calhoun's report was admirable, and its clearness of style and statement forced comparisons not flattering to the President's Message", a remark which might have been withheld had the author known that the message and report came from sources so closely allied as to be almost intermingled.

The style of the message may be profitably compared with that of Monroe, especially in his letters¹ of February, 1810, to Richard Brent; of September 10 and November 19, 1810, and January 23, 1811, to John Taylor of Caroline; of February 25, 1811, to L. W. Tazewell; and of June 13, 1812, to Taylor, the letter last referred to disclosing the policy of the administration with reference to the war.

The allusion in the last paragraph of the letter is to the *National Intelligencer* for September 3, 1853, which contained in full the speech of John Randolph of Roanoke, delivered in the House of Representatives, January 12, 1813, published for the first time with certain editorial notes. In one part of the speech Randolph spoke of the rejection of Monroe's and Pinkney's treaty of 1806 and said that the putting of "one of these Commissioners of the United States—these very missionaries of peace and conciliation—into the Executive Councils of this country has been the signal of War with Great Britain". Upon this the *Intelligencer's* note says:

There is nothing in the whole of this speech that is more worthy of the reader's attention than this passage, which it would be yet difficult for most readers of the present day to unravel without a clue to it. Mr. Monroe (at the time of this speech Secretary of State) had been the associate with Mr. Pinkney in the Commission at London, in the negotiation and conclusion of a treaty with Great Britain, which, on being transmitted in due form to the United States, was promptly *rejected* by President Jefferson, without even waiting to take the sense of the Senate upon it. Against this rejection Mr. Monroe had earnestly protested; and upon his return soon after to the United States publicly vindicated himself from what he considered as a harsh proceeding on the part of the Executive, and implying an undeserved reproach upon him as a Statesman and a Minister. Among those who evinced a decided feeling against the Executive in this controversy was Mr. Randolph himself, who became in some sort the leader of a party making common cause with Mr. Monroe, and carrying his zeal to the extent of seeking to place that distinguished citizen in the field as a candidate for the Presidency upon the approaching expiration of Mr. Jefferson's term of service. Eventually, however, things took a different turn. Before the election came on, Mr. Madison became the sole candidate of the Republican (Jeffersonian) party; and, long before the election actually took place, Mr. Madison and Mr. Monroe were brought together, during the summer vacation at Monticello, or elsewhere in Virginia—through the instrumentality, as it was then generally understood, of Mr. Jefferson—and whatever of coolness existed between them was entirely removed by amicable explanations. We do

¹ *Writings of James Monroe* (ed. Hamilton), vol. V.

not know that the friendship of Mr. Randolph to Mr. Monroe was by this latter incident turned to enmity, but it was sensibly abated. Nor was it at all restored by the acceptance by Mr. Monroe of the office of Secretary of State, offered to him by President Madison, midway of his first term of the Presidency, to fill the vacancy which was occasioned by the resignation of Mr. Secretary Smith, in the spring of 1811.

The passage in Mr. Randolph's speech upon which we are now remarking was hardly intended in kindness to Mr. Monroe—perhaps not in a hostile spirit—but certainly must be taken to convey a reflection upon his consistency in regard to the questions in controversy between the United States and Great Britain, out of which the existing war had sprung. However intended, it is due to the truth of history to say that Mr. Randolph hardly overstated the "fact" when he said that the accession of Mr. Monroe to the Cabinet had been the "signal of war with Great Britain." The connexion of the two events cannot, indeed, well be denied. We ourselves do not doubt that the opinions and exertions of Mr. Monroe greatly influenced the great event. We have ever believed, also, that his course in that trying emergency was most honorable to his discernment as well as to his patriotic and fearless spirit; and that, therefore, no disparagement could be inferred from it to his consistency as a true American statesman. This is not the place, nor have we now the time, to undertake to indite the unwritten history of that declaration of war. It would make a volume of itself. We content ourselves for the present with quoting from the late Oration of Mr. Crittenden (in memory of Mr. Clay) the following brief but just view of the position which Mr. Monroe occupied upon accepting the office of Secretary of State:

"Mr. Monroe had returned but a year or two before from a course of public service abroad, in which, as Minister Plenipotentiary, he had represented the United States at the several courts, in succession, of France, Spain, and Great Britain. From the last of these missions he had come home thoroughly disgusted with the contemptuous manner in which the rights of the United States were treated by the belligerent Powers, and especially by England. This treatment, which even extended to the personal intercourse between their Ministers and the representatives of this country, he considered as indicative of a settled determination on their parts—presuming upon the supposed incapacity of this Government for war—to *reduce to system* a course of conduct calculated to debase and prostrate us in the eyes of the world. Reasoning thus, he had brought his mind to a serious and firm conviction that the rights of the United States, as a nation, would never be respected by the Powers of the Old World until this Government summoned up resolution to resent such usage, not by arguments and protests merely, but by an appeal to arms. Full of this sentiment, Mr. Monroe was called, upon a casual vacancy, when it was least expected by himself or the country, to the head of the Department of State. That senti-

ment, and the feelings which we have thus accounted for, Mr. Monroe soon communicated to his associates in the Cabinet, and in some degree, it might well be supposed, to the great statesman then at the head of the Government."

The last paragraph furnishes an explanation of the allusion in Mr. Moore's postscript to the letter which follows.

GAILLARD HUNT.

WILLIAM W. MOORE TO RICHARD K. CRALLÉ.

Office National Intelligencer,
WASHINGTON, January 12, 1854.

Richard K. Crallé, Esq.

Dear Sir: The continued disability of Mr. Gales, in being deprived of the use of his right hand, has prevented, and still prevents him from replying *autographically* to your letter of the 27th ultimo, and he has therefore communicated to me the necessary information to enable me to answer, on his behalf, the inquiries contained in your letter.

The War Manifesto reported in the House of Reps on the third of June, 1812, was the production of Mr. Munroe. Of this Mr. Gales is positively certain, as well from other knowledge as from his familiarity with the handwriting in which the Report is written, being that of Mr. Munroe's Private Secretary and Confidential Clerk. The Select Committee by which this report was made had the subject referred to them at the close of the day's sitting on the 1st of June, and submitted their report on the opening of the House on the 3^d of June, which fact, taken in connexion with the importance of the subject and the conciseness of the statements of the report, sufficiently indicate the improbability that the committee could, within the brief time that intervened after the reference, have deliberated upon the subject, prepared this report, and had it copied. The committee consisted of Messrs. Porter, *Calhoun*, *Grundy*, *Smilie*, *Randolph*, *Harper*, *Key*, *Desha*, and *Seaver*. Mr. Porter, the chairman, was called home in consequence of sickness in his family, and did not return to his seat in Congress for some time afterwards, if at all. The names of the Republicans who made the war report are underscored in the foregoing list of the committee. If Mr. Porter had been present he would have sustained the report. Mr. Dallas had nothing to do with this report. He was not in Washington at the time, and did not enter the Cabinet till some two years afterwards.

That your wish to be supplied with the sheets of the "Annals" relating to this interesting branch of our national history, which will enable you no doubt to connect and explain many of the events of that time, will be complied with, I trust you will already have been furnished with some evidence in the receipt of the parcel already sent, and which were dispatched before your letter came to hand. When others are

ready I shall endeavor to have them franked by the Representative from your District.

Mr. Gales requested me to inform you that he will cheerfully afford you every aid in his power in the preparation of your work, and that you must not hesitate in submitting any point upon which you desire information.

I mail to your address herewith a copy of the *Intelligencer* of the 3^d of Sept. last, containing a Speech of Mr. Randolph, in the Notes appended to which, prepared by Mr. Gales with the aid of an amanuensis, is some reference to Mr. Monroe's agency in the War of 1812 which you may have overlooked. A letter has been received by Mr. Gales, since the publication of that speech, from a gentleman who was a confidential member of the Government at the time the Speech was made, entirely confirming the impressions stated in the "Notes" that Mr. Monroe was the author of the war Report.

Respectfully and very truly yrs. etc.

WM. W. MOORE

The above letter is in the handwriting
of my son, who copied it for me.

Jan. 20.—The above letter has been detained since its date that I might find leisure to search for an unpublished article written by Mr. Gales two or three years ago, from which I send you two or three extracts. These, as well as this letter, it is needless to say, are transmitted for your private information and guidance, but not for publication. In regard to the extracts, I heard Mr. Gales remark, at the time he prepared them, and also since then, that if ever he found time to write a book on the subject, they should form part of it. Would to Heaven his health would permit him to write such a volume! It would be one of a most interesting character. I send the extracts, of course, with his knowledge; but, *without his knowledge*, (as he is not here at the office,) I deem it not improper to say to you confidentially, that they formed a part of several columns of interesting historical matter, written at the request and for the use of an eminent *living* statesman, who found it necessary to use only a portion of the matter thus furnished. Relying alone upon my memory, I think that no part of the extracts herewith sent were used, and, if any, only a few sentences; and this is the reason why I now disclose to you the secret history of their preparation, that, in the event of any of these statements having before met your eye, you will be duly informed of their origin, and of the weight that should be given them.

Trusting that this long epistle has not wearied you,

I remain, etc.

WM. W. MOORE

R. K. Crallé, Esq.

Extracts from an unpublished article of Mr. Gales's.

When Congress assembled in Nov. 1811, the crisis was upon us. But, as may be readily imagined, it could be no easy matter to nerve the heart of Congress, all unprepared for the dread encounter, to take the step, which there could be no retracing, of a Declaration of War. Nor could that task, in all probability, ever have been accomplished but for the concurrence, purely accidental, of two circumstances. . . . Mr. Monroe had returned but a year or two before from a course of public service abroad, in which, as Minister Plenipotentiary, he had represented the United States at the several Courts, in succession, of France, Spain, and Great Britain. From the last of these missions he had come home, thoroughly disgusted with the contemptuous manner in which the rights of the United States were treated by the belligerent Powers, and especially by England. This treatment, which even extended to the personal intercourse between their Ministers and the Representatives of this country, he considered as indicative of a settled determination on their part, presuming upon the supposed incapacity of this Government for war, to *reduce to system* a course of conduct which, though perhaps begun by chance, had grown into a habit. Reasoning thus, he had brought his mind to a serious and firm conviction that the rights of the U. States as a nation would never be respected by the Powers of the Old World until this Government summoned up resolution to resent such usage, not by arguments and protests merely, but by an appeal to arms. His mind full of this sentiment, Mr. Monroe was called, upon a casual vacancy, when it was least expected by himself or the country, to the head of the Dep^t of State. That sentiment, and the feelings which we have thus accounted for, Mr. Monroe soon communicated to his associates in the Cabinet, and, in some degree, it might well be supposed, to the great statesman then at the head of the Government.

The tone of Pres^t Madison's first message to Congress, (Nov^r 5, 1811,) a few months only after Mr. Monroe's accession to the Cabinet, can leave hardly a doubt in any mind of such having been the case. That message was throughout of the gravest cast, reciting the aggressions and aggravations of Great Britain as demanding resistance, and urging upon Congress the duty of putting the country "into the armor and attitude demanded by the crisis and corresponding with national spirit and expectations."

Whilst Mr. Clay, Mr. Calhoun, and others, within the walls of the Capitol, were breaking lances with the opponents of the preparation for war, there was in operation, at the further end of the avenue, an influence less publicly exerted, but not less potent, upon the hearts and understandings of the younger Members of the House of Rep^s, and especially upon those who composed the Com^{tee} on Foreign Relations. Comparatively young and inexperienced in National affairs, they nat-

nally resorted to Mr. Monroe, who might be termed, without a hyperbole, the Nestor of the day, for information and advice as to the affairs of which, as Secretary of State, he was the official depository, and for the lessons of experience which he had acquired by long service abroad. To these gentlemen, in frequent private consultations, principally at his own abode in the long winter nights, he constantly repeated the deep conviction of which I have already spoken, of the infinite disgrace which would infallibly attend a longer submission to foreign insult and outrage; replying, night after night, to every suggestion of postponement, delay, or renewed attempts at negotiation, "Gentlemen, *we must fight*. We are forever disgraced if we do not;" disgraced in our own estimation, in the eyes of our adversary, "and in the opinion of the world."

In the face of a vigorous opposition, both Houses had finally passed several bills, which had become laws, for raising an army and enlarging the navy, with all the necessary adjuncts required for active military and naval operations, and authorizing a loan to carry into effect these measures.

Chiefly through the fearless influence of the counsels of these ardent patriots, the House of Reps., on whose decision, as the originator of all measures of revenue, the prosecution of a war must depend, was gradually warmed up to a war spirit. But the actual Declaration of war had not yet been proposed. The Pres^t had, not from any backwardness on his part, or doubt in regard to the necessity of a resort to arms, but deterred by a remaining doubt in his mind as to the House sustaining the Executive in a declaration of war, hesitated to recommend the measure.

More than six months had passed since Congress met, and the question of actual war was still in suspense. At length, after private conference, a deputation of Members of Congress, with Mr. Clay at their head,² waited upon the President, and, upon the representations of the readiness of a majority of Congress to vote the war if recommended, the Pres^{dent}, on the first Monday in June, transmitted to Congress his message submitting that question to their decision. The agency of Mr. Monroe in this measure was not yet at an end; for the Com^{ee} on Foreign Relations, to whom the President's message was referred, had prevailed upon the Secretary, as being more fully possessed than themselves of the facts and merits of the question, to prepare a Report upon the message; which Report was presented to the House of Reps. by the

²Here doubtless is the origin of the story repeated again and again by historical writers that the delegation called upon Madison and made an infamous bargain with him, promising him a renomination for the presidency in return for a war message, and that he reluctantly consented. See Hildreth, VI. 268; McMaster, III. 445; Von Holst, I. 230; Gay's *Madison*, 308; also for a truer account, Adams's *Gallatin*, 434, and Hunt's *Madison*, 316 ff. No author has thus far viewed the incident in the light in which the Gales narrative places it.

committee, as their report, on the second day after the reception of the message, and had been (from its length) evidently prepared, if not adopted, by the Committee before the message was sent in. It was an elaborate Manifesto, filling ten or twelve printed pages, and concluding in the following language, which no one who had ever heard Mr. Munroe discourse upon the subject, could doubt to have been his:"

Enclosed to R. K. Crallé, Esq.

January 20, 1854, by

Wm. W. Moore

The matter is copied in the handwriting of my son.

Wm. W. Moore

* *Robert Barnwell Rhett on the Biography of Calhoun, 1854*

ROBERT BARNWELL RHETT, who wrote this letter, was born at Beaufort, South Carolina, December 24, 1800, and died in Louisiana, September 12, 1876. His name was Smith, but in 1837 he adopted the name of Rhett. He served in Congress from 1837 to 1840 and succeeded Calhoun in the Senate. He went to Louisiana after the Civil War and a few years before his death was principal in a duel in which he killed his opponent.

The biography alluded to, a brochure of 74 pages, entitled *Life of John C. Calhoun, presenting a Condensed History of Political Events from 1811 to 1843* (Harper and Brothers, New York, 1843), was published as a part of the Calhoun propaganda for the presidential nomination, but it is far above the style of ordinary political literature, and has been the basis of much of the information concerning his life. The final paragraph of the brochure speaks of the friendship of the author for Calhoun and closes (the italics being

"Your committee, believing that the free born sons of America are worthy to enjoy the liberty which their fathers purchased at the price of so much blood and treasure, and seeing in the measures adopted by Great Britain, a course of aggression and persisted in, which must lead to a loss of national character and independence, feel no hesitation in advising resistance by force, in which the Americans of the present day will prove to the enemy and to the world, that we are not only inheritors that liberty which our fathers gave us, but also the strength and power to maintain it. Relying on the patriotism of the nation, and confidently trusting that the Lord of Hosts will go with us to battle in a righteous cause, and crown our efforts with success, your committee recommend an immediate appeal to arms."

(Of the following)

"England would satisfy the present Ministry of England short of unconditional submission, which it was impossible to make. This fact being completely ascertained the only remaining alternative was to get ready for fighting, and to begin as soon as we were ready. This was the plan of the administration when Congress met in December last; the President's message announce it; and every step taken by the administration since has led to it." Monroe to Taylor, June 18, 1812, *MS. A. 9. 2. 5*, ed. Hanthorne, V, 205.

in the original): "*His [the author's] statements of facts and opinion he knows to be entirely authentic, and after a deliberate review of every sentence and word he has written, he finds nothing which a reverence for justice and truth will allow him to alter.*" This *Life* has always heretofore been attributed to R. M. T. Hunter, Senator from Virginia 1847 to 1861, and Secretary of State to the Confederacy.¹

GAILLARD HUNT.

ROBERT BARNWELL RHETT TO RICHARD K. CRALLÉ.

SULLIVANS ISLAND Oct. 25 1854

My Dear Sir

It seems to me your course is very plain as to the Documents you mention. You are publishing the works of Mr. Calhoun. You should exercise a sound discretion as to what you should publish. But if you publish any matter which flowed from his pen, you should publish it as he wrote it. If *he* made corrections, insert them. But if others made corrections, the corrections ought to be rejected. In the Exposition for instance, it was greatly altered by the Committee who reported it to the Legislature of which I was one. Mr. Calhoun had nothing to do with these corrections and I know disapproved of them. I think you ought to include in your publication his Addresses to the People of the U. S. and South Carolina. He wished to have put them forth. They were read to the South Carolina Delegation in Congress to obtain their judgment upon them. They were suppressed, and greatly to his mortification and indignation. Publish them by all means. So his letter on Disunion. There is but one thing written by Mr. Calhoun that you ought not to publish as his—and that is—"*his life*." He wished me to Father it—but I told him, that it was impossible for me directly or indirectly to allow any one to understand that I was the author of a publication which I had not written. Hunter and I read it over together in my house in Georgetown. He inserted about a page and a half, and became the putative author; and it has done more to lift him to his present position than any thing else in his public life.

Are you going to write his life. If you are there are many things which ought to be unveiled. For instance do you know that when Tyler first quarrelled with the Whigs, he offered the office of Secy of State to Mr C——— with a carte-blanche as to the Cabinet. Hunter and I both urged Mr. C——— with all our might to take it. But after anxious consideration he declined it—one of the greatest blunders he ever committed. Wise knows I presume all about it—and of course Tyler. Dan Hamilton applied summer before last for two Documents

¹ Calhoun writes to his daughter, *Correspondence*, p. 524, "Mr. Hunter has rewritten most of the [sketch]; so much so as fairly to be entitled to the authorship"; but he says nothing of the original writer.

in my possession—one a letter of Mr. Calhoun as to the course South Carolina should pursue, if the other Southern States abandoned him in the controversy of 1850—the other was the curious proceeding by which the Southern Rights Senators in the Senate of the U. S. signed a paper pledging themselves, to defeat the Bill admitting California *by any means the majority of them* should determine on. Yet when the point came, they backed out—the Virginia Senators and the South Carolina Senators going against any measures whatever. This was the true cause of the failure of the South in that great controversy, and it is due to history and truth that the matter should be known. Did Hamilton give you these Documents, and do you intend to embody them in your life of Mr. Calhoun?

I assure you, it would give me great pleasure to assist you in any way in your labours of friendship to our great departed friend. Altho', my whole public-life seems to me to have been a failure and to have ended in vanity, yet I thank God, that so much of it, was spent in association with one so worthy of my esteem and admiration. I differed with him on two occasions—the election of Taylor, and the Mexican war. But in the last struggle of his and my political life, we came together again. We fought for the South. He fell dead in the cause

I, living. Had he lived we would together have conquered. As it is, neither of us will be able to vindicate ourselves. But time will do it for us—at least for him, for my name will be too feeble to be connected with his great fame. The Southern People have but one alternative—Independence, or ruin. Under the Union as it exists, our doom is certain.

I thank you for your kind invitation, and should I again visit Virginia, I shall surely avail myself of it.

Yours Dear Sir most truly

R. B. RHETT.

Mr. Richd. K. Cralle

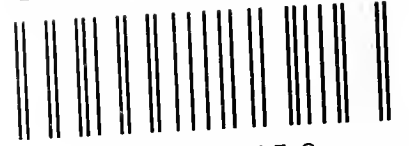
P. S. The manuscript you speak of was sent to a Committee in Charleston—Elmore Gourdin Cronin and others. I was on Sullivan's Island, a fugitive from Yellow fever with my family. As soon as I can go to Charleston I will see to it. The letter of Mr. Calhoun on our State Constitution, to which Judge Emory refers, I will send to you. It was published this summer in "The South Carolinian" in Columbia, and has contributed largely in rallying public opinion in the late elections.

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